

# Staff Papers

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# Managing recreation and tourism in the Whitsundays

BM Barnett<sup>1</sup> and CC Thomas<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Queensland Department of Environment, PO Box 5391, Townsville Qld 4810

<sup>2</sup> Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, PO Box 1379, Townsville Qld 4810

**Great Barrier Reef**

**Marine Park Authority**

**P.O. Box 1379**

**Townsville, 4810**

## ABSTRACT

The Whitsunday region is one of the most important holiday destinations in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. Visitors are attracted by the outstanding scenery of the islands, reefs and surrounding waters. Commercial operations cater for a range of recreational activities based on island and reef destinations, sites which are also accessible to private boat owners.

A substantial increase in tourism and tourist development in the Whitsundays has occurred since the 1960s, with a current growth rate of 3% per annum. Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority visitation records for 1994-95 accounted for a total of 487 000 visitor days in the Whitsundays, or 28% of the total commercial visitation to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and the Queensland Department of Environment are currently working together, in consultation with users, to finalise management plans for the Whitsunday island national parks and the marine parks.

Many of the issues identified during the planning process relate to the high levels of recreation and tourism use, including anchor damage, high visitor numbers and crowding, displacement of users, and unused permit allocation.

The plan will focus on protecting the area's special values whilst providing for a range of commercial and recreational opportunities. Strategies will be applied to manage areas of intensive and high use whilst maintaining other areas for moderate and low use, with appropriate levels of facilities. Sites of significant conservation and cultural value will be managed more intensively as 'restricted access areas'.

Detailed site plans are being prepared for sensitive sites requiring special management in the form of 'no anchoring areas' and public moorings to manage anchor damage.

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**GREAT BARRIER REEF**

MARINE PARK AUTHORITY

Great Barrier Reef  
Marine Park Authority  
PO Box 1379

Townsville Queensland 4810

Telephone: (077) 500 700

Facsimile: (077) 726 093